

# State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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## A Parade of Missouri Ag Successes

A couple of years ago, I was able to garner approval in the General Assembly to enhance legal protections for rice farmers through the creation of the *Missouri Rice Certification Act* ([HB 741](#)). The legislation created a nine-member advisory council to work with the Missouri Department of Agriculture to enact rules affecting rice producers. One of the purposes of the bill was to help keep commercial rice from being contaminated by genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The committee includes the director of the state agriculture department and members representing rice handlers, rice end-users, rice producers, university researchers, rice mills and seed dealers. This year, through legislation I was able to advance in [Senate Bill 153](#), we modified the definitions of “handler” and “end-user” to ensure the persons appointed in these positions are actually employed in these capacities — as was the intent of the original bill — and are not representing rice producers, so that we have balanced representation of all groups on the council. Under the council makeup, two appointed individuals are required to represent handlers and end users, respectively.

Many of you who have attended tractor parades may not have known that this enjoyable pastime was in violation of state law. To remedy this, I co-sponsored legislation this year — passed by the General Assembly in [HB 93](#) — that will ensure this rural tradition can legally continue.

Tractor parades, often organized as fundraisers by non-profit organizations and Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapters, are a great way to show support for agriculture and to raise funds. This year’s legislation will provide a way to legally hold the parades and ensure this activity is legal and safe by allowing licensed drivers to assemble tractors and parade down Missouri roads for fundraisers as long as they have approval from the Missouri Highway Patrol.

I also want to take this opportunity to highlight legislation passed by the General Assembly that will restore research funding to the Delta Research Center in Portageville for the construction of a new greenhouse. The center is set to receive approximately \$1.7 million in federal stimulus funding. Many of us are familiar with the cutting-edge rice research underway in the center’s ag fields, but there is some equally exciting research underway in its greenhouses — with room to grow. According to Dr. Gene Stevens, the center’s staff will expand its research in the areas of genetically engineered tobacco for cancer drugs and vaccines and growing cassava — a low-protein, starchy staple and large source of the world food supply — in the greenhouse. The center is working in cooperation with the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis to grow cassava tubers to expand the food supply of this third-world staple to African nations.

Regarding other state agricultural projects, you might also be interested to know that the General Assembly has committed \$35.5 million to fully fund the remainder of the ethanol incentive payments and has committed \$25 million for biodiesel incentive payments for fiscal year 2010 (subject to the governor’s approval).

Summer is almost here — a busy time for our Missouri farmers and agricultural community. Take care out there, and thanks for all that you do to support our state’s number one industry.

As always, if you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at 1-877-291-5584.

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